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SUBJECT: LIBERIA POLICE STRUGGLES TO REFORM, NEEDS
CONTINUED SUPPORT

Classified By: CDA Brooks Robinson for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Liberia National Police (LNP) faces numerous challenges as the Government of Liberia (GOL) increasingly looks to its security agencies to counter internal threats, most recently via an anti-crime campaign. The LNP leadership finds itself called upon to provide an effective police force while receiving limited resources, balancing personal political survival with reform, establishing an Emergency Response Unit (ERU), and overcoming the challenges of a weak administrative capacity. Although the LNP Inspector General (IG) has not implemented reform measures as fast as international partners prefer, she has made difficult decisions in favor of progress, including changes in her senior staff. The establishment of a capable ERU will further reform by increasing the LNP's ability to respond to internal security threats. Continued strategic planning by the LNP, assisted by the international community, is critical in ensuring the police are ready to respond as the international presence in country draws down.

The Impact of Intra-Government Relationships

¶2. (C) Command and control issues remain an impediment, especially between the Ministry of Justice and the LNP, a fact that complicates the IG's role and ability to implement reform initiatives. No new legislation has been signed into law updating a pre-civil war Executive Order that addresses the LNP. The head of the LNP used to be called Director until United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) arrived and introduced the title IG. At that time, the insignias indicating various ranks were also changed. These changes have not gone down well with members of the House and Senate Committees on National Security, who say that this was done without their consent or approval. The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) leadership intentionally refers to the IG as &Director8 both in her presence, through correspondence, and in forums attended by the IG's subordinates. This serves as a continuous reminder that the IG holds a Deputy Minister-equivalent position within the MOJ and is not the head of an independent agency. The Minister's distinction emphasizes his authority over the LNP, specifically the IG, and his ability to influence operational matters. Little separation of powers exists between the state and police to deter any future administration's misuse of the security organization to enforce a political agenda.

¶3. (C) The IG and LNP senior leadership do little delegating and are reluctant to take initiative on difficult issues. IG Beatrice M. Sieh carefully weighs decisions on how aggressively to implement police reform against her own political survival. She lacks a strong political network of her own and is not held in favor by the Minister of Justice and even less by the influential Minister of Defense. President Sirleaf remains her only lifeline. This same lifeline also introduces challenges. Commissioner of Operations Darlington George has a history of alleged corruption and violence; however, the President views him as a son and therefore he remains protected. On sensitive

issues, the IG uses the National Security Advisor, Dr. H. Boima Fahnbulleh, as a sounding board and conduit to probe for the opinions of the President and others in her administration before acting.

¶4. (C) At the same time, President Sirleaf has privately let known her disappointment with Sieh's performance, and has sometimes been critical of Sieh and the LNP in the press, further eroding the IG's effectiveness. However, President Sirleaf understands that replacing Sieh, the only female police chief in Africa, without a proper replacement will be politically risky. President Sirleaf plans to replace Sieh with present Deputy Director of the National Security Agency Marc Amblard when he returns from a USG funded fellowship program in June 2009.

Administrative Challenges Remain

¶5. (SBU) Even the most basic administrative functions are difficult for the LNP to effectively execute. Struggles include finalizing an accurate account of personnel and ensuring timely payment of those employees. As a first step, the LNP management, assisted by the United Nations Civilian Police Advisors, designed and implemented a force verification plan to gather a census of LNP employees. To date, approximately 2,800 out of a 3,500 workforce have been verified. The verification process includes developing individual profile folders containing biographic information and a photo. This verification effort provides a foundation for other LNP functions. Subsequent benefits include its use by the Finance Division to prevent payment fraud as well as

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by the Professional Standards Division for its internal investigations.

¶6. (SBU) Challenges still remain in terms of getting officers paid regularly and on time. A July 2008 report identified 2.5 percent (86 officers) who were owed several months back pay. Most are still paid in cash, and getting the cash to the right place and person on time is a challenge when vehicles are short and roads are poor. As a solution, the IG initiated a program for LNP officers to receive their salary by electronic disbursement. Officers continue to sign up for the program, which will include access at EcoBank branches in outlying counties.

Emergency Response Unit (ERU)

¶7. (SBU) In addition to providing four Civilian Police Advisors to the LNP, the U.S. Government has the lead on training the ERU, whose members, unlike most the LNP officers, will be armed. The ERU's mission is to plan and conduct special police operations especially in the areas of anti-terrorism, hostage rescue, internal security operation, tactical anti-crime operation, search and rescue in times of disaster, and provide support to Police Support Unit (PSU). The full strength of the ERU is planned for 500 with 200 remaining in Monrovia with the other 300 scattered through the country. At the current pace, the ERU will be approximately 300 by next spring. The initial recommendation by the ERU Advisor is to mentor an ERU component capable of responding within the capital area before overcoming logistical obstacles associated with operations conducted in outlying counties. To that end, the ERU Command Facility will be built next to Spriggs-Payne Airport four miles from central Monrovia, allowing for future airlift capability, which currently the GOL internally lacks.

¶8. (SBU) Of the original 200 trainees from Classes One and Two, only 143 students remain. Attrition has resulted from low morale brought on by delays in training. A delay in the arrival of weapons has resulted in some students going on their eighth month of training, five months longer than the

planned three month training curriculum. Other attrition is attributed to an inability to meet training standards and issues identified during the vetting process. The vetting process looks for criminal history, activities during the civil war, evidence of discipline problems, reputation, and attitude. (Comment: The recent arrest of two ERU trainees for armed robbery demonstrates the limits of vetting to remove bad apples.)

Long-Term LNP Development Strategy

¶9. (SBU) A UN-led process to develop a long-term strategy for the development of the LNP is underway with United Kingdom (UK) support. In July, twenty-two participants from LNP, the Ministry of Justice, the Governance Commission, UNPOL, UNDP, and representatives from the Governments of the United States as well as the United Kingdom met in Accra, Ghana. This exercise did not produce any new or program-changing ideas. However, the event did reenergize the Liberian participants to take ownership of police reform.

¶10. (SBU) Besides funding the Accra workshop, the UK sent two advisors to assess potential areas to expand its LNP partnership. The UK representative here, after consultation with UNMIL and the Embassy, will present the findings of the assessment to the GOL in early August.

¶11. (SBU) Comment: The LNP will play a critical role in the future security and stability of Liberia. Approximately half of the identified threats outlined in the National Security Strategy of Liberia are internal. As such, the LNP is likely to be the agency most commonly called upon to respond to Liberia's security challenges. Yet, the Government of Liberia and international partners provide far fewer resources to the LNP than to the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), even though the LNP is roughly twice the size of the current AFL force. Unless the LNP is adequately funded and trained, the GOL may in the future call on the AFL to respond to internal threats that fall under LNP jurisdiction and responsibility. For now, a robust and adaptive UNMIL presence has been able to keep the peace effectively, and as long as there is a credible UNMIL force present, the situation is not likely to change absent some fierce exogenous shock to the country. But the UNMIL drawdown and its eventual withdrawal will leave a need not just for a capable military, but for an equally capable police force, and continued U.S. Government support remains essential.

ROBINSON